

In the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for automatically accessing an information source to determine information related to a document when said document is presented to a user based on information contained in a bar code visibly printed on each of the documents comprising:

5 a bar code scanner electrically coupled to a local terminal for reading the bar code printed on said document;

means for automatically determining a routing code and an account number from the bar code, said means for determining located in said local terminal;

means for automatically deriving a security code from the encrypted security information contained in the bar code, said means located in said local terminal;

10 means, on said local terminal, for receiving a security code entered by a purchaser;

a modem electrically coupled to said local terminal in transmitting and receiving electrical communication therewith; and

15 a bi-directional underwriting institution switch electrically coupled to said modem and capable of automatically establishing electrical communication with the information source based on the routing code determined from~~contained in~~ the bar code by said means for determining.

2. (Previously Presented): The apparatus of Claim 1 further including means for saving information-contained in said bar code for use in future processing of information returned to said local terminal from the information source.

3. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 1 further comprising:
means for storing a plurality of distinct underwriting institution routing codes and corresponding underwriting institution contact information;
the bi-directional underwriting institution switch automatically establishing
5 communication with the underwriting institution issuing the one of the plurality of negotiable instruments presented by the purchaser based on institution routing code information contained in the

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bar code on said one negotiable instrument.

4. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for automatically accessing ~~[[an]] when said~~ when a document is presented to a user based on account information contained in a bar code visibly printed on each of the documents.

5 a bar code scanner electrically coupled to a local terminal for reading the bar code printed on said document, said bar code scanner capable of reading a bar code printed on a driver's license, and further comprising means for printing a reproduction of the driver's license bar code on a receipt for correlating said document presented to the and said driver's license bar code with said receipt;

means for automatically determining a routing code and an account number from the bar code, said means for determining located in said local terminal;

10 means for automatically deriving a security code from the encrypted security information contained in the bar code, said means located in said local terminal;

means, on said local terminal, for receiving a security code entered by a purchaser;

a modem electrically coupled to said local terminal in transmitting and receiving electrical communication therewith; and

15 a bi-directional underwriting institution switch electrically coupled to said modem and capable of automatically establishing electrical communication with the underwriting institution based on the underwriting institution routing code determined from contained in the bar code by said means for determining.

5. (Previously Presented) A method for automatically accessing and verifying with an underwriting institution the status of an account underlying one of a plurality of negotiable instruments and the authority of a purchaser to issue said one negotiable instrument against said account when said one negotiable instrument is presented to a merchant based on account information and encrypted security information contained in a bar code visibly printed on each of the plurality of negotiable instruments for establishing that the purchaser is recognized by the underwriting institution as an authorized issuer of said one negotiable instrument against said account, comprising the steps of:

a) reading the bar code printed on the one negotiable instrument;

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- 10 b) deriving an underwriting institution code from the bar code;
- c) deriving an account number from the bar code;
- d) deriving a security code from the encrypted security information in the bar code;
- d1) entering a security code;
- e) automatically contacting the appropriate underwriting institution based on the
 underwriting institution code contained in the bar code;
- 15 f) transmitting the account number and the security code to the appropriate
 underwriting institution;
- g) receiving account status information from the underwriting institution only when
 the security code and the account number are verified; and
- h) displaying the account status information.

6. (Original): The method of Claim 5 wherein step (e) comprises a software routine using a look-up table containing underwriting institution codes and corresponding underwriting institution contact information for automatically establishing communication with the appropriate underwriting institution.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 5 wherein step (e) comprises contacting automatically and in real time the proper underwriting institution based on the underwriting institution code.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 5 further including the step of including the account information and encrypted security information contained in said bar code for use in future processing of the transaction.

9. (Original): The method of Claim 5 further including the steps of reading bar code information from a driver's license, automatically determining driver's license information from the driver's license bar code, and automatically verifying the driver's license information.

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10. (Currently Amended) A method for automatically accessing an underwriting institution for verifying the status of an account underlying one of a plurality of negotiable ~~instrument~~instruments and the authority of a purchaser to issue said one negotiable instruments instrument against said account when said one negotiable instrument is presented to a merchant based on account information and encrypted security information contained in a bar code visibly printed on each of the plurality of negotiable instruments for establishing that the purchaser is recognized by the underwriting institution as an authorized issuer of said one negotiable instrument against said account, comprising the steps of:

- a) reading the bar code printed on the negotiable instrument;
- b) deriving an underwriting institution code from the bar code;
- c) deriving an account number from the bar code;
- d) deriving a security code from the encrypted security information in the bar code;
- e) automatically contacting the appropriate underwriting institution based on the underwriting institution code contained in the bar code;
- f) transmitting the account number and the security code to the appropriate underwriting institution; and
- g) receiving information from the underwriting institution regarding an account only when the security code and the account number are verified;
- h) displaying the account status information; and reading bar code information from a driver's license and printing a reproduction of the driver's license bar code on a receipt for correlating said negotiable instrument presented to the merchant and said driver's license bar code with said receipt.

11. (Currently Amended): A method for automatically accessing an underwriting institution for verifying the status of an account underlying one of a ~~negotiable~~ plurality of negotiable instruments and the authority of a purchaser to issue said one negotiable instrument against said account when said one negotiable instrument is presented to a merchant based on account information and security information contained in a bar code printed on each of the plurality of negotiable instruments for establishing that the purchaser is recognized by the underwriting institution as an authorized issuer of said one negotiable instrument against said account, comprising the steps of:

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